

## Lights, Camera, Action! Video-Game Technology Gives Fitness a High-Tech Boost at Ohio Elementary School

**Issue:** When schools want to create innovative physical education and health initiatives, finding funding can be a challenge – and when they find it, they face the daunting decision of how best to spend it. In 2010, the Kenston School District in Chagrin Falls, a semi-rural community of 11,400 located 30 miles east of Cleveland, was one of only two in Ohio to secure a federal Carol M. White PEP grant of more than \$650,000. When grant team member and SHAPE America member Chris Maistros visited the Sierra Vista Junior High School in Santa Clarita, CA, she found her needed inspiration.

**The Big Idea:** Maistros, an “outside the box” educator who has spent the past 23 years as a PE teacher and health specialist at Kenston’s Timmons Elementary, was instantly captivated by Sierra Vista’s innovative PE program, which uses state-of-the-art multimedia equipment that incorporates video-game technology and fitness to get kids up and moving.

**SHAPE America** – Society of Health and Physical Educators is the nation’s largest membership organization of health and physical education professionals. The organization sets the standard for health and physical education in the United States, and its National Standards for K-12 Physical Education serve as the foundation for well-designed physical education programs across the country. SHAPE America was also a proud member of the coalition that developed the National Health Education Standards, and is a founding partner of the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, *Let’s Move! Active Schools* (now Active Schools) and the Jump Rope For Heart/ Hoops For Heart programs.



Timmons Elementary students pedal on youth spin bikes and ellipticals in the PLAY Blue fitness room.

“Students could hardly wait for their turn to play,” she says. “They became instantly engaged and active, and were thrilled by their own progress.”

The grant committee used a former music room at Timmons that could accommodate a selection of Exergame and tech-based youth fitness equipment. A team of Kenston administrators, PE teachers, district employees and parent volunteers worked to roll out the PLAY (Promoting Learning in Active Youth) Blue initiative and brand in 2011.

**Implementation:** “Our mission was to help students develop lifelong fitness skills and translational health habits,” says Maistros. “We also wanted to serve the needs of every student in K-3 and be all-inclusive.”

Throughout the school year, the PLAY Blue fitness room is a student favorite. Twice a week for 40 minutes, the students rotate grade by grade through the equipment,

building muscle groups, improving coordination, and mastering new skills. Students remain active and engaged while maintaining moderate-to-vigorous physical activity levels.

The Lightspace® Play fiber-optic floor offers eight movement-based games, including “Tennis Pro,” where players use footwork to keep a virtual tennis ball in play and remain in constant motion to block their opponent. A Xavix video game console teaches boxing moves that require fancy footwork and speedy hand-eye coordination.

To elevate their heart rates, students pedal on Exerbikes linked to televised Pixar games. Interactive light walls improve hand-eye coordination and reaction speed. The Railyard System, a portable, versatile indoor obstacle course, develops strength, balance, coordination, agility, flexibility, endurance and cardiovascular health, all while burning calories. The



multimedia HOPSports training system engages students in video-based exercises ranging from dance to sports to martial arts. Kid-size stationary bikes and junior ellipticals, mini-trampolines, fitness balls, SandBells® and yoga mats provide even more options. Rock-climbing walls installed in the gym help improve upper body strength, balance, agility and confidence.

Maistros also teaches proper nutrition in fun and engaging ways. The Timmons health and wellness committee has a semi-annual push to encourage students to wear the color of a designated fruit or vegetable and pack it in their lunches. New fruits and veggies are sampled at the lunchtime A to Z Bar, and Heinen's Grocery Store sponsors tasting events that introduce students to healthy foods such as kale, asparagus, quinoa, pomegranate, cauliflower, avocado and summer squash.

Kenston's K-6 students also don chef's hats and aprons for the Future Chefs Cooking Contest, sponsored by the food services company Sodexo. The most recent competition challenged students to come up with healthy breakfast recipes.

Diverse activities also include "Walking Wednesdays," a recess walking club that brings together students and playground proctors; cross-country skiing on the beautiful wooded trails rimming the school; and seasonal use of the high school's synthetic-turf track for PE classes and events.

Throughout the day, Maistros finds fun ways to promote fitness. "Sometimes, I get on the P.A. system, announce an all-school brain break, broadcast a fun song, and ask kids

to form conga lines in the halls," she says. Spontaneous "brain breaks" or "activity breaks" encourage movement during regular classes and provide short, energizing bursts of exercise. At Timmons, even teachers get involved: A step challenge implemented by the health and wellness committee encourages them to team up and track their daily steps, cheered on by colleagues.

**Takeaway:** "There are many resources to tap for financial assistance and support — you just need to apply for them," says Maistros. "They've made the grant application process more user-friendly. If possible, schools should hire a grant writer or seek help inside or outside the school."

She also has found Kenston's Parent Teacher Organization to be a great fundraising partner to finance items such as new cross-country skis and boots, DJs for Jump Rope For Heart events, and Field Day ribbons.

Maistros is a big believer in social media and actively follows other schools' innovative PE programs on Twitter. "It's like Pinterest for PE and offers great lessons, teaching ideas, videos and a wealth of resources," she says. "Twitter is also an effective communication tool."

**Results:** By the time students leave Timmons Elementary, they will have been exposed to many fitness offerings and experienced the benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle. "Exercise should be fun," Maistros says. "The trick is to get kids to work out without even realizing it. Be creative. Gamification is a new concept that brings kids' favorite video games to life in a PE setting, infusing storytelling, points, levels and

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challenges. We are the stepping stones for kids. Encourage them and hopefully they will follow your lead."

Through PLAY Blue and other initiatives at Timmons, students are gaining fitness skills, self-esteem and confidence. Teachers are seeing increased attention spans during regular classes, and parents are giving the school district a big thumbs-up for the positive changes they observe at home.

"Grandparents are invited in for an annual Grandparents Day to observe and participate," says Maistros. "They are always amazed by the equipment and technology."

The district's support of healthy, active lifestyles has also garnered state-level kudos. For the past four years, Timmons Elementary has been awarded gold-level status by the Ohio Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance — as one of only three schools in Ohio to achieve the top honor in their Excellence in Physical Education Program.



### SHAPE America's National Standards for Physical Education

The physically literate individual:

- ✓ Demonstrates competency in a variety of motor skills and movement patterns.
- ✓ Applies knowledge of concepts, principles, strategies and tactics related to movement and performance.
- ✓ Demonstrates the knowledge and skills to achieve and maintain a health-enhancing level of physical activity and fitness.
- ✓ Exhibits responsible personal and social behavior that respects self and others.
- ✓ Recognizes the value of physical activity for health, enjoyment, challenge, self-expression and/or social interaction.

### Additional Resources

Links to more information about this program can be found at [shapeamerica.org/casestudies](http://shapeamerica.org/casestudies).



50 Million Strong by 2029 is SHAPE America's commitment to put all children on the path to health and physical literacy through effective health and physical education programs.